

Wednesday, October 25, 1967
11:50 a.m.

Pres file

Mr. President:

This passage from a recent
briefing by Gen. Davidson, J-2 in
Saigon, will interest you.

W. W. Rostow

WWRostow:rla

84a

Day by day, the war in the south is becoming more and more a North Vietnamese war. To this date, Hanoi has not publicly admitted the introduction of military forces into South Vietnam. We have evidence that there are at least 55,000 North Vietnamese in the country with substantial numbers being infiltrated each month.

We also have mounting evidence that the southern-born enemy is rapidly losing heart for the war. Once the enemy was able to recruit about 7,000 men per month from the population. Now we believe fewer than 3,500 are recruited; and many of these are boys 14 and 15 years of age. Women are also being recruited where possible in order to release more men to combat. No doubt the enemy is trying to offset his recruiting deficiency in the South by increasing his rate of infiltration from the North. While we do not know just how successful he is we believe he has not sent south enough men to offset his losses during the past several months. We believe the tide has turned and the enemy strength is on the decline.

I have stated that there is evidence of faltering morale and discipline among the southern enemy--the true Viet Cong. There are fewer but significant signs that the Northern invader is likewise weakening. Here are just a few extracts taken from captured diaries and letters:

"As we go to the South, we are told that we are going to liberate the South, that we will be welcomed, that we will fight the Americans. But when we arrive we are not greeted as liberators. When we enter villages, the people ask us to leave. I begin to feel like a leper."

Another wrote about his trip to the South:

"Walked 30 km today--began to eat canned food--walked 17 km today--bridges washed out. Walked 22 km today--troop morale is down."

This same diary covered a period of more than three months while his unit moved through the jungles of Laos into the Central Highlands of South Vietnam. Near the end of the diary are entries which indicate that many of his comrades have been left behind due to sickness brought on by the hostile elements and severe shortage of food.

One soldier wrote his parents saying:

"Today I am in the innermost recesses of a forest in the Western Highlands. Here I live a life without joy, and sometimes I feel like a dead man. We are

waiting for the time to fight, but I have received some bad news. A number of my comrades were killed in battle. I think the same fate is awaiting me."

These are mild statements, typical of the average conditions experienced by the enemy. There are others which describe conditions so horrible that we consider them to be untrue.

To understand the true significance of the enemy's situation you must realize that the war has taken a subtle but dramatic change over the last few months. The enemy is now steadily losing control of the populated areas. And as in any insurgency when you begin to lose control of the people you are beginning to lose the war. The enemy's problem then is how to reverse this population loss?

He can go on doing what he has been, but this will surely lead to defeat since each day he grows weaker while we grow stronger.

He can negotiate, but we see no evidence that he has any serious intent to negotiate on terms acceptable to us. There has been some talk of using negotiations as a means of gaining time in which to rebuild his forces.

He can make a last ditch try using all or a part of his remaining forces in North Vietnam. Should he do so, the battle would be difficult but the outcome would certainly be his total defeat.

He would ask for volunteers from China, Russia, and other bloc countries, but there is no evidence that either China or Russia are willing to engage us in a ground war.